Cites & Insights:
Crawford at Large

Volume 1, Number 13: December 2001 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

Important notice for a handful of readers: Volume 1 of *Cites & Insights* is *not* complete. This is the final issue for this volume. However, a "volume+" index, covering all of Volume 1 and the December 2000 Preview issue and including a title sheet for the expanded volume, will appear in the next few weeks—almost certainly by December 16.

The first issue of Volume 2 will appear at least a week after that index and may reflect some changes based on a survey of CICAL Alert members.

One reader suggested that I should mention current appearances elsewhere. For what it's worth, the final article in "The E-Files" trilogy (on Web-based zines and newsletters) will appear in the December 2001 *American Libraries*—and although I have no other articles queued up for publication there, "The Crawford Files" will begin in January 2002. "DisContent" continues in *EContent*, with "Choices and Complexity" as the December 2001 column.

The Filtering Follies

Read these reports. They offer strong factual ammunition against mandatory filters. No further introduction required.

Edelman, Benjamin, "Sites blocked by Internet filtering programs," October 15, 2001 (cyber.law.Harvard.edu/people/edelman/mul-v-us/

The page noted here is an overview to Ben Edelman's expert report for Multnomah County Public Library et al. vs. United States of America et al, a key CIPA case. The page links to a number of documents resulting from Edelman's careful research, including a redacted version of his testimony to the court. (That means chunks of it are blacked out—unfortunate, but it's still worth reading.)

His conclusion is that Internet blocking programs used in libraries will inevitably block Internet content that doesn't meet the programs self-defined category definitions; that such programs can't block only those Internet images that meet certain definitions; that they will always underblock; and that they won't support reasonable ways to do the "researcher unblocking" called for in CIPA. In short, the filters don't work.

In long, he provides three appendices. One 66-page document lists 395 blocked sites, from the Aberdeen Independent newspaper through Young Adult Librarians' Help/Homepage, showing which programs blocked them (and why) and how Yahoo and Google (presumably the Open Source Directory) categorize them. If that's not enough, a 3MB PDF file shows 6,382 sites inappropriately blocked, with similar notes.

The programs reviewed here are probably the best of the lot, set for pretty minimal filtering. Edelman's report adds hard, carefully researched evidence to the case against mandatory filtering.

Inside This Issue

Heins, Marjorie, & Christina Cho, "Internet filters: a public policy report," National Coalition Against Censorship, Fall 2001. (www.ncac.org/issues/internetfilters.html)

This report is long (53 pages *plus* two appendices) and entirely in ugly sans serif. It is, in essence, a literature survey summarizing "all of the studies and tests that [NCAC's Free Expression Policy Project] was able to locate describing the actual operation of 19 products or software programs that are commonly used to filter out World Wide Web sites and other communications on the Internet." Following a

brief executive summary and introduction, the bulk of the report is 40 pages of summarized reports on over- and under-blocking, grouped by the particular filtering program (from AOL to X-Stop). The (unviewed) appendices show blocked sites by category and blocking category definitions for various filters.

The filter-frenzied crowd won't take much comfort from this report. "Nearly every one…revealed massive over-blocking by filtering software." That won't matter to David Burt, the many organizations that have hijacked the word "Family," and the rest of those who regard the First Amendment as a nuisance—but it provides solid evidence for librarians and other mainstream Americans.

The third paragraph of the executive summary says it quite nicely:

> [Overblocking] stems from the very nature of filtering, which must, because of the sheer number of Internet sites, rely to a large extent on mindless mechanical blocking through identification of key words and phrases. Where human judgment does come into play, filtering decisions are based on different companies' broad and varying concepts of offensiveness, "inappropriateness," or disagreement with the political viewpoint of the manufacturer.

You probably know some of the examples. BESS blocked the Traditional Values Coalition; CyberPatrol blocked sites for Vincent Van Gogh and the City of Hiroshima; CYBERsitter blocked news items from Amnesty International; I-Gear blocked a United Nations report on HIV/AIDS; SafeSurf blocked the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union; SmartFilter blocked the Declaration of Independence (*a dangerous document if there ever was one!)*; SurfWatch blocked various human rights sites; WebSENSE blocked Michigan State's Canine Molecular Genetics Project; X-Stop blocked "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," and *lots* of filters blocked House Majority Leader Dick Armey's Web site—can't let those Dicks get through.

After reading this report, you might conclude that—while filtering decisions should *always* be at the local library level—any conscientious library that uses filters on PCs outside the children's area should *absolutely* clarify that Internet access is being limited in unpredictable ways having little to do with the quality or usefulness of information. That's like having a sign over the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: "Bunches of articles are missing, but we don't know which ones and it won't be obvious." That's what a library does when it filters the Internet on all PCs; at least it should be honest with its users.

There's a *lot* of detail here. Additionally, many of the 70 reports summarized are available online, with URLs provided. The authors do a good job of identifying problems with testing methods used and are careful to provide reasonably neutrality. They're not out to prove that filters are bad; they're out to show what studies have been done, how well they were done, and the results that they yielded. That includes more information on *under*blocking than you might expect—and, if you're dealing with bad law, underblocking is as much a danger (to libraries) as overblocking (to users).

Skimming through the report, I continue to get the sense that CYBERsitter is the most proudly and blatantly offensive product on the market, that CyberPatrol and BESS may mean well but can't escape the problems of filtering technology, and that filter manufacturers seem to be truth-challenged (or "differently honest") when it comes to claims for how or how effectively their software works.

Along those lines, the *Boston Globe* had an encouraging story on October 18: "Few libraries install filters to block porn." That message seems to be turning up around the country: quite a few library boards are deciding that CIPA asks too high a price for the Internet subsidy. Unfortunately, that means that, should ALA fail in the fight to overturn CIPA, only wealthier libraries—those that can afford to maintain good Internet access without the subsidy—will have full Internet access. Today's government taking steps that widen the gap between the haves and have-nots? How could that happen?

PC Values: November 2001

November's standard configuration includes 128MB SDRAM, 24x or faster CD-ROM, AGP graphics accelerator with 32MB display RAM, V.90 modem, a 16" (viewable) display (called 17" by some makers), and wavetable sound with stereo speakers. "Pluses" and "Minuses" are shown where applicable, along with hard disk size, software, extras, and brand-name speakers. Except as noted, all systems come with WindowsXP Home Edition.

Top system prices are taken from "recommended systems" for home/small business use at corporate Web sites for Dell and Gateway on October 28, 2001. Once again, Dell and Gateway systems offered better value than other nationally advertised systems in all price ranges.

- **Top, Budget:** Gateway 300X: Celeron-1100, 80GB HD. *Minuses:* No dedicated display RAM. *Pluses:* 256MB SDRAM, CD-RW drive. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, Boston Acoustics speakers with subwoofer, both Ethernet and modem,

Epson Stylus C40UX printer. $999, VR 4.00 (+33% since 8/2001, +28% since 5/2001).

- **Top, Midrange:** Gateway 700S: Pentium 4-1800, 80GB HD. *Pluses:* 256MB RDRAM, 64MB display RAM, DVD-ROM. *Extras:* MS Works Suite 2001, CD-RW drive, Ethernet and modem, Boston Acoustics speakers with subwoofer. $1,499, VR 3.18 (+21% since 8/2001, +24% since 5/2001).
- **Top, Power:** Dell Dimension 8200: Pentium 4-2000, 40GB HD. *Pluses:* 256MB RDRAM, 18" display, DVD-ROM drive. *Extras:* MS OfficeXP Small Business, Harmon Kardon surround-sound speakers with subwoofer. $2,179, VR 2.23 (no change since 8/2001, +15% since 5/2001).
- **One Good Configuration:** Gateway 700S, upgraded to Windows XP Professional, OfficeXP Small Business, and 18" Diamondtron display along with home networking adapter. $1,977, VR 2.72 (+20% since 8/2001).

PC OS Stability

Thanks to those who responded to my "payment" survey. There were 90 usable responses from more than 80 people.

While I didn't get hundreds of responses, the patterns were clear enough to make a good article. That article will appear as my "PC Monitor" column in the March 2002 *Online Magazine*. Briefly, Windows NT-kernel and Mac operating systems are more stable than Windows 9x; Windows 98 is more stable than Windows 95; and all of them are more stable than the nonsense you read from some technology writers. Most people shut down their systems at the end of the day, a good way to save power and avoid reboots. There's another thousand words in the column and I think it's worth your time to read.

More than half of the readers who responded had comments to make. Those comments suggest that people know the causes of their system instabilities and offer a variety of insights into PC use among librarians. The rest of this piece consists of selected quotes from those responses. All the quotes are anonymous (you know who you are!), and I've put a bracketed note about the OS, RAM, and stability before quotes where it might make a difference. Quotes are in no particular order. Thanks for writing this section of *Cites & Insights*!

The Users Speak

[NT4, 256MB] I seldom *have* to reboot, but I generally do reboot every couple of weeks because of my long-held belief that it's a good idea to "flush" the system every so often.

[NT4, 128MB, 80-160 hours] When I do run into a problem it is usually with my browser. Netscape used to give me problems so I switched to Internet Explorer and have far fewer browser problems. I use my computer most of the time I am at work with four or more windows open at all times, usually MS Outlook, one or more browser windows, OCLC, Voyager, and Cataloger's Desktop, as well as interspersed use of MS Word…

My library uses Windows NT, and I can't remember the last time my machine crashed.

[Mac 9.1, 196MB] I leave it unrebooted for a week or two at a time easy. Most crashes due to using RealAudio, and on a slow machine that's not surprising. (Same user, at work: W95, 128MB: "I leave it on all the time and some time in the middle of the 2nd day everything goes to hell.")

My current operating system—Windows 2000 Pro—has run as long as 80+ hours without a crash. It may have run longer if I were not constantly installing and deleting software, mostly of the shareware type. I developed the habit of frequent reboots in the Windows 3.11 days.

[W98, 128MB, 80 hours] Any problems I have generally have to do with our #%&#$@ Novell server.

[NT4, 260MB] I can run this baby for any number of hours. Ever since the library migrated to its own network…we have had more stable environments. Now, I can have any number of programs open (and I'm a heavy user), and the most I'll have to do is End Task for one program (usually Internet Explorer). [At home: W98, 50MB] Usually needs to be restarted after 2-4 hours of use; more often if surfing the Internet (although clearing the memory & disk cache does seem to keep it going an hour or two longer).

[W98, 128MB] I'd say on average no more than 4 (in other words, at least twice a day). It gets particularly rough when I'm running Photoshop, which I do a lot. Photoshop strikes me as high strung, and Windows 98 strikes me as uncooperative. (I like to personalize my software.)

[W98, 128MB] Every two weeks. Switching from Netscape to Internet Explorer 5.5 about six months ago has allowed me to move from rebooting several times a day to every two weeks or so.

[W98, 32MB] It runs about 58 hours a week…and is used by many different staff members, some of whom are not exactly Masters of the PC Universe.

Reboots, to my knowledge, almost always involve Netscape/Internet and happen about every 20 hours of use.

[W2000, 128MB] Usually reboot once every six hours due to bad script code in browser cache.

[NT4, 168MB] Three to four hours until need to reboot due to known Lotus Notes R5 problem.

[W98, 64MB] I reboot once a day or the software I use for virtual reference freezes up.

[W2000, 128MB, on full-time] From the system logs it appears I reboot my computer once every two to four weeks. Problems that stick in my mind that lead me to reboot are: 1) Hardware upgrades, such as adding an internal Jaz drive (which I hate by the way), 2) Once in a while Windows Media Player forgets how to play MIDI files… 3) Adaptec's Direct CD occasionally gets confused…. My staff runs more than 20 computers running W2000 Pro. It's almost unheard of to reboot these, and these machines run 24/7 using the ancient and gross OCLC Passport, ILLiad, Internet Explorer, MP3 players, graphics programs, etc., etc. We had similar reliability with Windows NT.

[W98, 128MB] I must reboot my machine daily if I'm using it. It doesn't typically crash when I'm not here—only when I'm using it. I've always thought it's because I multitask so heavily.

[NT, 256MB, servers] Configured to reboot themselves at 2 a.m. Why? Because if I don't reboot them at 2 a.m., I end up having to reboot them at some point during a working day and people don't like that. It's not that the machine has failed, exactly…just that it isn't working as well as it should. Most of these problems are related to long-term resource leaks, which I believe plague NT much more than Unix because the NT programming paradigm is based around threads rather than forks, and because so many people use non-garbage-collecting programming languages… Users have been *educated* to not expect resilience. I think this is a shame.

[W95, 64MB] It's down for reboot almost once every two hours (at home). The OS and RAM just can't handle most of the software loaded on it—you hear a steady stream of clicks from the hard drive as it tries to cache whilst Internet Explorer is loading. At work, I'm using…Windows NT with 200MB RAM. It works just fine most of the time.

[W98, 128MB] It lasts a couple of hours before rebooting… It is more robust when I don't use AOL IM, MS Home Publishing or Yahoo Radio. When I don't use them, I have *many* fewer problems.

[W98, 128MB] It often runs all day with no problems. The usual cause of crashes is me getting impatient and clicking too quickly and overwhelming it—usually happens in MS Word.

[NT, 128MB, and Mac 8.6, 64MB] Both crash several times a day. The crashes are almost always due to Microsoft applications… particularly… Powerpoint presentations containing embedded Excel files. But it happens with anything in Powerpoint—anything on the whole "inset" menu reliably crashes a Mac G3 portable so thoroughly that it won't recover 'til the system goes to sleep.

[W98, 128MB] Four to five weeks as an average time… I'm not completely compulsive about it, but do tend to run scandisk, defrag, reg clean, etc. on a real regular basis.

[W98, 256MB] It freezes up…about every 14 to 16 hours of use. Tasks seem to freeze more often since we moved to Outlook 2000 for email and Trend Micro for antivirus. Non-fatal task freeze up happens about four times per week in addition to the three fatal events noted above.

Journals and Technology: A Few Belated Notes

Why am I about to comment on five "old" items—one from 1997, one from October 2000, two from March and April 2001, and one from May 2001? Because I was, until recently, planning to write a media-related book and these articles were in the bin of background material for that book. I've abandoned the book and gone through the bin, discarding most material. These survived. All are worth reading, all are available on the Web, and all yield easy-to-read printed versions.

The September 1997 issue of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* (www.press.umich.edu/jep) featured articles on e-journals, including "Testing the promise" by Pat Ensor and Thomas Wilson. This article discusses the history and then-current status of *Public-Access Computer Systems Review*, usually known as *PACS Review*.

I served on the *PACS Review* editorial board throughout its history, wrote the "Public-Access Provocations" column for the first five years, and published one substantial non-refereed article in 1993. I also prepared the print editions of the first five volumes and have one of relatively few complete sets sitting in a bookcase at home. In other words, I'm biased—I know that *PACS Review* was one of the earliest refereed free electronic journals, I'm confident that it was important within the library technology field, and I was proud to be associated with

it. I was sad when it went into a state of decline, although I didn't do much to prevent that. (The journal has now formally ceased publication.)

Pat Ensor and Thomas Wilson took over from the founding editor, Charles W. Bailey, Jr. Their article offers an interesting, thorough update on how *PACS Review* worked. (An earlier article by Bailey appeared in the January 1991 *Online.)* Unfortunately, while the article describes an ongoing publication with a healthy flow of manuscripts, it appeared toward the end of that process. Five articles appeared in 1997. One appeared in 1998, the last time *PACS Review* appeared. You can reach them all on the Web, to be sure; even if the URLs change, Google will get you there.

Michelangelo Mangano, a researcher at CERN (where the Web began), presents us with a mild oxymoron. "Electronic journals: a user's experience" appeared in the October 2000 *High Energy Physics Libraries Webzine* (library.cern.ch/HEPLW)—and it's distinctly critical of the concept that full-text access can reasonably replace bound sets of printed journals. It's a fascinating read and offers a number of useful suggestions for making electronic journals more effective. He ends with a plea to retain print journals until electronic versions improve considerably, a comment on the cultural value of visiting the library, and a note of his pleasure that CERN restored his favorite journals to the library shelves.

The next two items work together. Kenneth Frazier published "The librarians' dilemma: contemplating the costs of the 'Big Deal'" in the March 2001 *D-Lib Magazine* (www.dlib.org/dlib); the April 2001 issue included a series of letters related to the article that are, in total, longer than the article itself.

The "Big Deal" in this case is "an online aggregation of journals that publishers offer as a one-price, one size fits all package. In the Big Deal, libraries agree to buy electronic access to all of a commercial publisher's journals for a price based on current payments to that publisher, plus some increment." The core of Frazier's argument appears as a one-sentence paragraph:

> Academic library directors should not sign on to the Big Deal or any comprehensive licensing agreements with commercial publishers.

Kenneth Frazier is Director of Libraries at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He makes a compelling case that is not without flaws—and the series of responses try to hone in on those flaws. To my mind, they *partially* succeed—but I wonder whether this is a case where what's "right" may be implausible in the real world.

Part of me would love to come down squarely on Frazier's side—the part that appreciates the power of browsing bound volumes, that is disturbed by the power and pricing policies of the big international publishers, that understands that when you cancel a declining print publication you get to keep and use all of the previous issues—while when you cancel an online subscription, you lose access to *everything*.

But I don't run a medium-sized academic library, I'm not faced with budget issues (at least not ones related to journal publishing), and I recognize that growing interdisciplinary scholarship may mean that library users need the much broader range of specialized journals that Big Deals offer.

Read the article and the letters and consider related articles and opinions (some mentioned in previous issues of *Cites & Insights*). There may not be a "right answer" here.

Finally, the May 2001 *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* includes an article by Sandra L. De Groote and Josephine L. Dorsch, "Online journals: impact on print journal usage" (available through www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov). These health science librarians at the Library of the Health Sciences-Peoria (a regional site of the University of Illinois at Chicago) surveyed print journal use during a period in which online journals were being rapidly introduced to the library system. It's a thoughtful article that points out some weaknesses of such studies (since as much as three-quarters of journal use in an open-stack library may not be reflected by shelf-return measures). Key conclusions, paraphrased:

- Ready access to online journals can be linked to a decline in use of print journals, *including core journals not available online*.
- There's some reason to believe that students (at least) are compromising quality for convenience.
- The decline in print-journal use is *not* sufficient to justify dropping the print subscriptions.

Worth reading—and it's clearly written, not too long, and available in print-friendly formats.

Trends and Quick Takes

Oh Boy! CueCat for the Mac!

That's right: Digital:Convergence finally released the CRQ software that makes :CueCat "useful" in a Mac version. *Macworld* for October 2001 says that the Mac software began shipping this summer. It's not an entirely favorable story: "Digital:Convergence says the CueCat eliminates entering long addresses and hunting for Web pages.

No word on how that works if you don't read magazines or watch TV while tethered to your computer."

While the scanner still costs as much as it's worth (nothing), now you have to pay shipping and handling. For what? As this story notes, hackers have rewired CueCats for other barcode-reading purposes and the article includes a URL for one of the major sites for such modifications (but no "cue" to get to it).

Sabon at *Macworld*

When I discussed "Stories between the ads" in March 2001 (pay no attention to the first-page footer!) I took an indirect swipe at *Macworld*'s silly typography. In September 2000, the magazine changed to an annoying typeface ("looking like one giant ad" is how one reader put it) that was set with 14 points leading (or interline spacing, if you prefer). That's an enormous amount of white space between lines as compared to other magazines. It looked as though *Macworld* was trying to stretch its text to justify more ad pages. The text itself wasn't particularly large, probably 10 point. Most professional magazines are set with 9 point type on 11 point leading or 10 point on 12 point leading; *Cites & Insights*, *Consumer Reports* and *American Libraries*, for example, all use 10 on 12, while *PC Magazine* uses 9 on 11. On a full page, 12-point leading may yield 55 lines per column, while 14-point leading yields only 47 lines—a significant difference.

Belatedly, I should note that *Macworld* has seen the error of its ways. As of July 2001, the primary text face in *Macworld* is Sabon, an elegantly readable serif design—and the normal body type is set 10 on 12. It's much easier on the eye, articles flow better—and you can tell the articles from the ads. Still, I'll go along with reader Ron Goldman: "Now, how about fleshing out the pages with more articles, more tech facts, and more ratings comparisons?"

Warning: Jackass at Work

To my surprise, the eBookWeb site isn't quite as uniformly gung-ho about the ebook "revolution" as I expected, although its founders are true believers. I've been checking it now and then, noting provocative pieces whether I agree with them or not. In that process, I printed off two "TrendSiters" columns—both posted the same day—by one Sam Vaknin, the author of *Malignant Self Love—Narcissism Revisited.* I planned to discuss both of these in "Press Watch II" but I think that gives them more attention than they deserve. One is called "The Internet and the library," the other "The fall and fall of the P-zine" (print magazine). Both are absurd.

"It is amazing that the traditional archivists of human knowledge, the librarians, failed so spectacularly, to ride the tiger of the Internet, that epitome and apex of knowledge creation and distribution." "The managers of printed periodicals—from dailies to quarterlies—failed miserably to grasp the Internet's potential and its potential threat." Need I go further?

Vaknin apparently knows as much about public libraries as he does about print magazines. He claims that the Internet and library are "competitors. One vitiates the other… The Internet, unless harnessed and integrated by libraries, threatens their very existence by depriving them of patrons." In the other column, we learn that "magazine reading is not habit-forming." Right.

Being a glutton for punishment (or hoping that Vaknin just had a couple of bad days), I downloaded another, longer piece that wasn't a TrendSiters column: "Will content ever be profitable" (9/16/2001). There I learn that *all* "content suppliers" on the Internet lose money (which will come as a surprise to Lexis/Nexis, OCLC, and several others), that "most users like to surf … the net without reason or goal in mind," (presumably why nobody uses Google or Yahoo!), that the early Internet was a "complete computer anarchy" (until it was privatized, of course), and that Moore's Law means that "computing power quadruples every 18 months"—oh, and that consumers *always* wind up shifting to paid media, which explains why broadcast radio and TV ceased to exist. (You still get radio? Could Vaknin be wrong?) "Studies discovered that no user, no matter how heavy, has consistently re-visited more than 200 sites, *a minuscule number*." [Emphasis added.] Really? How many people subscribe to more than 200 magazines or regularly watch more than 200 TV stations or listen to more than 200 radio stations—or, setting media aside, *regularly* visit more than 200 stores or 200 restaurants? Come to think of it, if you add together the magazines, newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations you regularly deal with, does that *total* come to more than 200? If so, you're more of a media junkie than I am. So why would I *regularly* visit more than 200 Web sites (as opposed to occasionally visiting sites based on referrals from my regular haunts)?

I should be pleased. As long as writers of this quality keep popping up, I'll never lack for cheap commentary. But I'd rather focus on serious issues, ones with more ambiguity. I never was much for the carnival sideshow. After two or three more chunks of nonsense, I stopped reading this particular geek: the stunt wears thin after a while.

Contentville Closes

Ever hear of Contentville? Neither did most other people. It was another part of Stephen Brill's once-mighty media empire, along with *Brill's Content* and *[Inside]*. His idea was to sell quality information sources of all sorts—ebooks, articles, transcripts, research reports, and original material. You know the huge market among the general public for dissertations? Contentville was there to serve that market.

Contentville managed to undermine the editorial integrity of *Brill's Content*, at least in theory, as Brill took on as partners many of the media giants that the magazine presumed to judge. He also ran into problems with resale rights. Mick O'Leary's complimentary writeup at infotoday.com says that Contentville "was committed to excellent writing, whatever its source"—but its tiny staff was in no position to enforce standards of excellence. I visited the site once and was so distressed that I never returned. What I saw was a jumble of "content" with nothing to distinguish it or entice me to pay for it.

My toughest writing about the notion of "content" appears in "DisContent," my monthly column in *EContent*. I'm afraid the death of Contentville offers another demonstration of one of my abiding beliefs: people don't buy content because content, *treated as such*, has no value.

Gerry McGovern (an Irish writer who produces *New Thinking Newsletter* at www.gerrymcgovern.com) offers an interesting perspective on the death of Contentville (which apparently burned through $120 million in its brief life!). He begins by noting two "fundamental mistakes" made with regard to content: The more content the better, and technology will organize and publish content professionally. He notes that the Web tends to give us too much stuff anywhere we turn—and that Google's success depends largely on human editorial decision. I hadn't thought of Google's two-level link ranking that way, but he's right: a link is a *human* assertion of interest and worth. His conclusion: "For anyone who wants to make a success of a website, there is one decision that must be made before any other: Hire an editor."

Brill was honest in his email to Contentville's staff announcing the shutdown. "Despite the great work of the Contentville staff and the great support we had from our partners, my idea for Contentville just didn't work."

AOL is Watching You

Surprise, surprise: America Online will start using Web bugs and cookies "to enable the company to better target advertisements to its members." The San Francisco *Chronicle* ran the story on October 5 (from the LA *Times*). AOL used to boast about its commitment to protecting the privacy of its huge membership. But when there's a buck to be made…

Burning DVDs

"Trust us: You will eventually own a rewritable-DVD device." That comes in the third paragraph of a four-page story, "The DVD dilemma," in the November 2001 *PC World* (pp. 26-9). You can probably guess that I feel the same way about "Trust us" as I do about "inevitable"—my BS detector goes off the scale. Similarly, the first paragraph: "It's been a while coming, but the day that you'll trade both your trusty CD-RW drive and your familiar VCR for a new rewritable-DVD device is fast approaching."

If by "fast approaching" Jon L. Jacobi means "in the next couple of years," I suspect he's wrong for most of us—at least partly for reasons discussed in the rest of the article. First, to be sure, the drives and blanks are still far too expensive for everyday use. The bigger problem may be that there are *three* different formats for rewritable DVD, all with strong proponents and each with its own compatibility problems. It's great that you can now buy a DVD burner for less than $600—but which format?

Don't expect answers for several years and don't assume that companies will converge rapidly on a single format. This article provides a reasonable picture of today's situation, but I'd take the sidebar "Your copy rights with DVD" with several grains of salt. We're told, "You already know that copying commercial DVD movies is illegal." As far as I know, that's not true. You should have the same fair-use rights with purchased DVDs as with any other purchased products, and that should include the right to make a backup copy—but it's *infeasible* to copy most commercial DVDs (as with most commercial videocassettes) thanks to copy-protection schemes. Yes, until (unless) DMCA is overturned, it's illegal to break the copy protection scheme—but that doesn't make the act of copying *itself* illegal. "Consumer advocates and some legislators are now wondering if, in the effort to preserve content owners' rights, too modest an effort has been made to preserve consumers' rights." There's an understatement—but the following sentence requires a double reading: "New legislation and court cases are in progress that may change the interpretation of the DMCA." That's true—but some proposed legislation would make the situation worse, not better.

DVD Magazines?

I've been working on one potential article for two years now, trying to answer this question: Can you produce a workable magazine in some medium other than print? Think of this as informal notes toward that article or column (which may never appear) and as one more failed case along the way.

I knew of several attempts to produce CD-ROM magazines; to the best of my knowledge, they all failed. A fair number of print magazines come bundled with either CD-ROMs or audio CDs, a trend that seems even more common in the UK—but those are still print magazines. There were early attempts at VHS-based magazines; again, I know of no survivors.

DVD has more promise. The discs are as cheap to mail as CDs and almost as cheap to produce, and thy have enough capacity and branching capabilities to offer a "magazine-like" experience. The ads could be as involving as the content, if done right.

In December 1998, *InsideDVD* appeared—not only a DVD magazine, but a *freebie*. You had to sign up for each issue on the Web site, but if you didn't need the protective DVD case, the issue was free—and each issue included a complete feature film. I learned about *InsideDVD* when it had already published three or four issues. The only way to get back issues was with a paid subscription, which also meant that discs came in Amaray cases. I paid for a subscription, including back issues, and tried them out. The details of those early issues (and those since) may be part of the article, if and when…

InsideDVD began as a "quarterly" with issues dated December 1998, Spring 1999, Summer 1999, and December 2000 (oops). Then it moved to bimonthly publication, only available by paid subscription, with the first "bimonthly" issue appearing in March 2001. I re-upped my subscription just to see how this would turn out—and because, by December 2000, the content had become reasonably interesting albeit scarcely compelling.

That was March 2001. The seventh issue (or second "bimonthly" issue) appeared in late October—but now it's in a cardboard bifold instead of a plastic Amaray case and it's included with *Total Movie & Entertainment*—which is a print magazine.

Conclusion? As a pure DVD magazine, *InsideDVD* didn't work. Apparently *Total Movie* didn't work too well either (the publisher of the combined magazine is Versatile Media One, which published *InsideDVD*)—and, based on the first combined issue, I can see why. The editor seems compelled to state up front that the staff dislikes romantic comedies and that "if you [have favorite romantic comedies], then you should be reading *O*." What a way to relaunch a magazine: slap half your potential readers in the face. A sneering juvenile editorial attitude persists through the remainder of the magazine. There seems to be no way to send email or letters to the editors; that may be just as well.

Will the combined magazine survive? Hard to say. I'm not canceling (much as I dislike the current print portion) because I'm still fascinated by the experiment—but the first issue, 108 pages including covers, has 13 pages of advertising. That's not a promising start.

Speaking of promises, the subscription pitch promises that I'll receive a "starter package" of 40 movies on DVD, shipped following receipt of payment. I'm not holding my breath, but if the package ever arrives I'll let you know.

They're not kidding about the free movies in each issue. The DVDs are either double-sided or (for two brief issues) two-DVD sets. The first three issues included "Telling Lies in America," "The Big Squeeze," and "Infinity"—all interesting contemporary pictures with strong casts. The fourth issue came with the original "Little Shop of Horrors," a film that appears to have been made for $200 or so but has its vagrant charms (and a very young Jack Nicholson); the fifth includes the original 1935 "Scrooge," but from a print so bad as to be almost unwatchable. The sixth, "The Last Time I Saw Paris" in an adequate print (we haven't watched it in full). The current issue includes "Night of the Living Dead" and at least two hours of other content (much of it trailers).

Score zero for viable DVD magazines; if the combo survives, it's as a print magazine with DVD attached. At $9 a pop (or $40 for six issues by subscription), it's a little chancy.

Gizmo Fatigue?

Here's how Marty Beard puts it in *Media Life* for November 1, 2001: "America losing its lust for media gizmos." That's the headline; the story is that the rate of adoption for new devices is slowing down. That always happens, of course, but it's happening sooner than expected even by reasonable analysts. Knowledge Networks/Statistical Research's Ownership Reports says that some of these technologies have reached the saturation point—everyone who wants them already has them.

For example, nine percent of households studied have broadband access to the Internet this fall. This spring, the figure was…nine percent. That's up from five percent in fall 2000 and two percent that spring, but all those fervent projections of convergence and

the like assume not only growing adoption, but that the *rate* of growth would continue to grow. Could it be true that only one out of ten families gives a damn about broadband? You couldn't prove otherwise by me.

Some other saturation points seem perfectly reasonable. Cell phones are stuck at 59% (in the U.S.); Internet access from home at 53%; home computers at 61% (up from 60% this spring); and PDAs at 12%. Meanwhile, DVD moved from 16% in the spring to 20% in the fall.

There's precedent for saturation. As Daniel Tice of Knowledge Networks notes, cable TV has been available to some 90% of U.S. households for a decade—but subscription levels stalled at 65%.

Some figures will move up when the economy improves and people see desirable uses. On the other hand, I've always assumed that at least a third of families just don't have much use for home PCs or cell phones (again, in the U.S. with its excellent landline phone system), so moving much above 60% penetration may be quite difficult.

A related story appeared November 5 on *Wired News*. The FCC says that home broadband has leveled off at 10%, roughly the same level. That puts a crimp in several ambitious online-entertainment schemes. Without broadband, people won't pay for the entertainment, and lots of us figure that the whole "buy broadband so we can charge you more for entertainment" idea is a scam.

Ebook Appliance Déjà Vu

You never know what will kick off a flurry of pros and cons about ebooks on a library-related list. This time, it was the *New York Times* article mentioned in last month's "Ebook Watch." The day of the article—August 28—and for three days thereafter, postings flew across Web4Lib telling us why ebook appliances would (or would not) take off now, soon, eventually, or ever. The cluster of threads picked up again in mid-September.

This "essay" began as part of "Ebook Watch." I had planned to quote key passages with credit to the writers. I understand that it's bad Netiquette to quote list messages unless you ask each writer first. So I changed it to a set of paraphrased excerpts. Then I found that the whole thing worked better as a standalone essay.

If you believe I'm creating more straw men you can review the messages themselves in the Web4Lib archives on sunsite.Berkeley.edu (Google will get you there). The major thread is "Why eBooks and When?" but there are also relevant threads at "As TV didn't destroy radio…" and "eBooks can exist with…" The Publib thread is "e-book readers."

I've rearranged paraphrased excerpts into clusters of pro, con, and mixed comments. Each paragraph comes from a separate posting; don't expect linear narrative here! You might get more sense of an actual debate by reading postings chronologically—but it's one of those debates where people are frequently talking *past* people on the other side. Almost all of these postings were about ebook appliances—dedicated readers—rather than the complex field of ebooks as a whole. I should note that I continue to be pleasantly surprised that Web4Lib, with thousands of opinionated subscribers, functions so well without moderation.

Ebook Appliances Will Succeed

In case it's not obvious: these are *not* my opinions and must not be quoted as my opinions, although I would agree with a few of the points made here.

Most things take longer than expected. We need a killer application in ebooks that will do things real books can't—possibly hypertext, video clips if a film is mentioned, being able to read at night without disturbing others. Ebooks remain the best way for a library to get books to its clients on the web—if the copyright issue can be solved.

Imagine carrying all of Balzac's *Comedie Humaine* to the beach with you and being able to look up every occurrence of his character Eugene Rastignac in any novel. Also, ebook appliances will engender true ebooks, breaking the 500 year old chain of linear narrative and creating new types of story structure: new ways of telling traditional stories in a less linear fashion.

Ebook appliances make pretty good sense for a lot of textbook applications, and Web-based teaching aids have done pretty well at big universities. Trade publications have been the wrong way to get ebooks started.

Ebooks will take off when we see titles that offer something special—for example, children's picture books and graphic novels for teens with music, video and interactive features.

What we need is the E-Map: a screen using electronic ink to display any map you program into it with an embedded GPS receiver so the map moves as you do. Add a stylus so you can touch the map to get more information; the combined map/travel book sounds like a killer app. Otherwise, nonfiction (reference) ebooks may hit big before fiction does.

The paper book *forced* us to tell stories in a linear fashion. Hypertext will allow us to find new structures—linked parallel or overlapping lives, "speared" novels with common chapters that tell quite different tales. The possibilities for new structures are endless but were constrained purely by the form of the printed book.

Right now ebooks can download tens of thousands of titles off the Web for free. You can carry around dozens of texts on a two-pound device, look up words in a built-in dictionary, enlarge the print with the push of a button, annotate and highlight, and read them in the dark. How do you do these things with a paperback?

Webbooks are ideal for students. Textbooks and standard research material work really well as Webbooks—but reading comprehension and behavior is *different* online than on paper. As for ebook appliances, they seem to do well in library circulation.

The "Net generation" will not have the same biases against reading ebooks. These devices will be pervasive for them and it will seem much more natural for them to read an electronic screen. (And, later…) People adapt to what has become the norm. When ebooks become useful to kids or pervasive, they'll adapt.

I love the printed book but we're likely at the end of its era. These are early days. A better analogy [than "8-track tapes," raised below] might be the horseless carriage around the end of the century.

Kids These Days just love electronics.

I am happy to think about the possibilities for the majority of authors who can now publish ebooks that are potentially accessible to a vast audience at a nominal cost. Add the value of digital distribution of educational materials instead of bound books. How about the patrons who now take out five or ten books at a time just taking one device home?

OED, Britannica and Americana are a few works that spring to mind as much easier for most people to use in digital variants—but substantial articles in Britannica would be painful to read on something like a PDA. For special cases such as physicians' pocket references, printed in tiny type on thin paper in order to cram a lot of material into a small volume, a PDA-based ebook can't be worse as a reading experience and is much more practical—and, of course, the text is for consulting, not reading.

Ebook Appliances Will Fail

Again, most of these comments do not represent my opinions—although I am on record as believing that ebook appliances won't replace print books and probably won't succeed as mass-market devices, *except* (possibly) in education. The last two paragraphs *do* represent my own opinions, since they're paraphrased from my postings.

What compelling reasons do we as consumers have to adopt ebooks? Look at the marketing of ebooks: lightweight, portable, easy to read, simple, flexible—but so is a paperback and it costs $285 less. You lose the control, longevity, tactile traits, ease of use, familiarity and collectability that come with paper books.

Ebooks won't catch on until you can leave one on the bus or drop it over the side of a tour boat without worrying about getting it back (which implies a $10 price point).

Computers are for searching; paper is for reading.

I don't know what biases the "Net generation" will have, but they have the same eyeball design that hasn't been upgraded since Homo Sapiens 1.0. Comments about resolution, contrast and reflectivity aren't being stick-in-the-mud; they address fundamental areas of readability.

Ebook appliances (at least the current devices) will quickly become the 8-track players of the early 21st century.

I wonder if they'll get that far? 8-track succeeded for a while. That's just not happening with ebooks. Most folks could go the rest of their lives never owning an ebook. They just don't see the point.

I've heard the "early days" argument for more than a decade, which makes it contradictory with the printed book being at the "end of its era." Ten years ago we didn't have print-on-demand (which can reduce the overhead of backlist print books) and venture capital was easy. Conventional wisdom then was that problems with ebooks would be solved in two years (from whenever you asked). Since then, display resolution has barely improved, battery life improves very slowly, and you still can't produce a high-contrast display that doesn't use transmitted light. When you're more than a decade into a process and talking about "early days," one can only assume the process will take generations if it happens at all. Since mass-market paperbacks and near-universal literacy date back less than a century, "at the end of its era" is a considerable overstatement.

I suspect that the next generation is much readier than ours to discard or avoid tools that don't work very well. The young'uns have learned that these are tools, not magic; if they're crappy tools, why bother? I expect them to be even *more* jaundiced regarding inferior reading devices—but "inferior" is a complex, situational word. Sometimes print is inferior. Sometimes the screen is inferior. I'll bet that, a

decade from now, I'll still be writing about this cluster of issues—and it will be no nearer resolution than it is now.

Damned If I Know

These people have opinions—but they're not solidly for or against appliances or ebooks in general.

I could not picture ebooks ever superceding printed books, even without the "Digital Divide." I think there is a fundamental egalitarian and bonding element in the use of printed books. A major advantage [of ebooks] is the ability to download in different languages. As a layperson, I am concerned about archival issues.

I enjoy checking out forays into nonlinear storytelling, but I doubt that such fiction will replace the pleasures of linear stories (the novel). The novel as a genre works for many people as a powerful means to introduce readers to new life experiences and states of consciousness.

I wonder if the answer to "Why ebooks and when?" doesn't lie in the proliferation of a single device that does multiple tasks, one of which is displaying ebooks? My PocketPC has Microsoft's eBook Reader, but it also has my schedule, my spreadsheets, my Word documents…and an MP3 player. When I don't need a separate ebook device and when my existing devices display better for reading, then I'll read more ebooks.

I don't want to read fiction on ebook appliances. I like my paperbacks just fine and rather like having tons of hardback fiction decorate my bookshelves. But I would *love* to get that two-ton *Learn JavaScript in 14 Days* as an ebook!

Children *do* use interactive story CDs, and sometimes those are the only stories read to those children. The experience need not be isolated: siblings and parents interact using these products.

As long as there are people like me who really are in love with the concept of the printed word, ebooks won't take off. Fewer people than you might think are ready to do away with print and embrace ebooks, ejournals, enewspapers, etc. Some reference books, computer manuals, maybe textbooks are fine uses of ebooks. But stories, poetry, works of art belong in nice old-fashioned books.

[Referring to the "horseless carriage" analogy]: Why do you drive a car? Because they are relatively easy to get, fuel is readily available, and your car goes faster than a horse. Horseless carriages didn't become popular until they offered something far better than a horse did. Ebook appliances are too expensive and fragile. What's the easiest solution? Right now, a book. People won't dump that solution just because someone says it's a good idea.

Any device purporting to replace the book will have to represent as much of an increase in convenience to the reader as going from a scroll to a book did way back when. That may be true now for some circumstances, but in most cases the ebook format doesn't really add anything and is more difficult to read for many people. If it costs just about as much to download a novel as it does to just go out and buy the paperback, what's the point? Today's proprietary appliances are probably in danger of becoming obsolete—more like the dedicated word processors such as the Wang.

Books are perfect for text meant to be read linearly. An electronic format with search engine and hyperlinks makes more sense for encyclopedias, dictionaries and reference books in general. Textbooks tend to fall in between. Economics might squeeze the short print-run nonfiction title out of the print world.

Copyright Currents

Balance. That's what we should be seeking when it comes to copyright. Balance between the rights of the creator and those who use (and pay for) intellectual property. Appropriate recognition of intermediary rights—those of publishers and distributors on one hand, libraries and archives on another, aggregators and creators of derivative works on the gripping hand (thanks, Jerry Pournelle). That's what we need—and, until recently, that's roughly what we had with books, magazines, newspapers, and even sound recordings.

I've included a *lot* of copyright-related items in *Cites & Insights*, and you can bet I'll be writing about these issues in "The Crawford Files," beginning with the February 2002 edition. Items and clusters are roughly chronological.

If You Like DMCA, You'll Love SSSCA

"To provide for private sector development of workable security system standards and a certification protocol that could be implemented and enforced by Federal regulations, and for other purposes." That sounds innocent. It's the summary of the staff working draft of SSSCA; you can read the 13-page draft at cryptome.org/sssca.htm

Trouble begins in the very first section:

> IN GENERAL.—It is unlawful to manufacture, import, offer to the public, provide or otherwise traffic in any interactive digital device that does not in-

clude and utilize certified security technologies that adhere to the security systems standards adopted under section 104.

The exception is a grandfather clause: you can sell used devices that were legally manufactured and sold prior to the effective date of the legislation. That doesn't appear to mean that, for example, Dell could *continue* to sell PCs that didn't have the killer chips.

What's prohibited? You can't alter or remove security technology; you can't transmit copyrighted material that's been unencrypted. The security measures can't prevent personal time-shifting copies of broadcast and non-premium cable or satellite TV, but forget time shifting an HBO movie.

The killer chips—not SSSCA's term—must provide for "secure technical means of implementing directions of copyright owners, for copyright material, and rights holders, for other protected content, with regard to the reproduction, performance, display, storage, and transmission [of] such material or content." Note what isn't there: "pursuant to fair use provisions" or *any* limitation on "directions." RIAA wants your legal copies of your own CD tracks to be wiped off your hard disk once a month, even if it messes up the disk? Sounds like a "direction of copyright owners" with regard to "storage" to me; the killer chip *must* support that capability.

What happens if the device makers can't agree with the copyright holders on how these devices should work—a reasonable bet, since most device manufacturers think SSSCA is a truly awful idea? Easy: the government sets the standards, working with NIST and the Register of Copyrights.

What's an interactive digital device? Any product, software, or technology, whether on its own or as part of something else, that's used for and capable of "storing, retrieving, processing, performing, transmitting, receiving, or copying information in digital form." I'm not sure whether a digital clock would qualify but you could hardly draw more inclusive boundaries.

I can already hear the sales pitch for this bill: "It's not about unbalancing copyright, it's about *security*, and who can be against security?" Children aren't mentioned (yet), but that probably comes next. Included is a bunch of money for NIST to develop techniques to improve computer security and for government-funded scholarships for people studying computer security. On its own, Title II seems harmless and possibly valuable.

Skim through this summary and you see a bill to improve computer security and privacy. Read it carefully and you see a massive shift in the same direction as DMCA: not only favoring publishers and producers over buyers and free speech but forcing device producers to burden their products with enforcement mechanisms (and buyers to pay for those mechanisms).

The groups behind this bill get full marks for sneakiness. Does Senator Hollings (sponsor of SSSCA) realize what an awful bill he's pushing? Stay tuned.

The sneakiness didn't work. The Open Source community and others paid attention. *NewsForge* has an interesting posting from Tina Gasperson (posted October 19, with comments following; www.newsforge.com). Among other things, SSSCA appears to undermine user-modifiable operating systems. This time, it's not "just a bunch of hackers" opposing the proposal (supposing an easy way to dismiss Open Source and EFF advocates). The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) warns of the bill's bad effects.

Not surprisingly, Open Source folk assume that "software monopolists" are behind SSSCA along with "entertainment oligopolists." How, then, to explain a ZDNet News item from October 22 (www.zdnet.com/zdnn), "Techs broadside anti-piracy plan"? Technology companies including IBM, Intel, Compaq, *and Microsoft* held a press conference to oppose SSSCA. The news item says that, while Disney's a key backer of the bill, AOL Time Warner doesn't like the current bill and MPAA isn't quite willing to endorse it. I'll suggest that any intellectual property bill that's too unbalanced for MPAA is *way* over the top!

While not directly related, an October 15 *Wired News* item by Declan McCullagh is too good to pass up: "RIAA wants to hack your PC." Remember the USA/PATRIOT Act, the rushed anti-terrorism bill? One section was "Deterrence and Prevention of Cyberterrorism," which would make it a federal crime to break into computers and cause damages "aggregating at least $5,000 in value" within a one-year period. That seems reasonable enough.

Not to the RIAA. They wanted an exemption stating that "no action may be brought under this subsection arising out of any impairment of the availability of data, a program, a system or information, resulting from measures taken by an owner of copyright in a work of authorship, or any person authorized by such owner to act on its behalf, that are intended to impede or prevent the infringement of copyright in such work by wire or electronic communication." It would also immunize actions "reasonably intended to impede or prevent the unauthorized transmission" of pirated materials.

In other words, the RIAA wants to be sure that if it hacks into your system to delete MP3s (which might or might not be pirated—past history shows

that the RIAA doesn't much care) and something goes wrong, *you can't do anything about it*. If the hackers chose the wrong computer (there are no pirated MP3s on my PC, although there are legal MP3s) and wiped out my hard disk, that's tough: they're just doing their job and can't be sued.

Orin Kerr used to work in the Justice Department and is now at George Washington University. His take: "It would deny victims their right to sue copyright owners and their agents if they engaged in vigilante justice by hacking or other means in an effort to block online music distribution." Oddly enough, the hired hands in Congress didn't buy this nonsense—yet.

A bit later, *EFFector* 14:32 (October 24, 2001) (www.eff.org/effector) notes that SSSCA hearings have been postponed "in the face of mounting opposition from the technology community." Senator Hollings may start listening to a broader constituency "and has indicated that he would consider modifying the bill." One good start would be to rip out the whole first section so that it's *really* a security bill, not a power-grab by media intermediaries.

Pat Schroeder Breathes Fire for DMCA

A September 20 press release from the American Association of Publishers summarizes Schroeder's adamant support for the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in a speech to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Deriding an "Internet culture which [*sic*] opposes the idea of ownership," she answers the fair-use issue with the statement "no software can read intent," so it's only appropriate to prevent any copying at all. You'll find the press release on AAP's Web site (publishers.org).

I had the idea that the AAP and libraries were partners of sorts, albeit occasionally uneasy ones. With Pat Schroeder in charge that partnership appears headed for doom. At times Schroeder appears openly antagonistic to libraries; at other times the AAP tries to make nice even as it pursues the most draconian forms of overprotection.

Schroeder's entire speech appears on the AAP site. It's surprisingly short (four print pages) and assures us that AAP was a primary lobbyist for DMCA. Here's her reading on technology company opposition to DMCA:

> Our insistence that intellectual property owners be protected from piracy made us the enemies of 'openness.' The technology companies' definition of 'open' was 'free.' Our opponents started advocating that everything on the Internet should be free. The popularity of Napster shows that people like to get things free and will take whatever they can access. They don't feel like pirates if they take it in their own home.

There it is, straight out: just like the MPAA and, recently, the RIAA, Schroeder's AAP has concluded that *we're all thieves*. For that matter, Schroeder seems to be saying that technology companies (Microsoft, Intel, IBM, other sleazy operations) are opposed to intellectual property. Note the wording: not "some people" but "people." Not "don't understand intellectual property" but "will take whatever they can access." In Schroeder's eyes, *we are all thieves who must be forcibly restrained*. I find this appalling and would like to hope that it's a temporary change for the worse at the AAP.

Here's her take on Stephen King's experiment serializing a long-abandoned partial manuscript. "He asked those who downloaded it to pay him a dollar for each chapter. Halfway through the book he called a halt, because not enough people were paying and he couldn't figure out how to recover his costs." Funny: the way I heard it, King made more than half a million dollars during the experiment—and, if he ever gets around to writing the rest of the book, he might start it up again. Ask me (or any but the top two percent of all writers) how I'd feel about selling a mere $500,000 worth of an incomplete manuscript, and I can assure you "freeloaders" won't be the word that comes to mind!

Schroeder's comment on why people pay for computers and Internet access? "One reason they willingly paid is that those selling the technology and online services convinced them that there was a huge candy store in cyberspace and everything was free." I must have missed those Intel, Dell, and Gateway ads about easy piracy, and somehow I missed the AOL "get all the music you want, free" ads as well.

She strikes out at librarians too. "Many librarians, who share our passion for free speech, converted that passion into advocating free content. There are many who are still trying to reopen the DMCA debate and gut the enforcement provisions. While people were willing to pay for the equipment and connections to access the Internet, they weren't willing to pay for content on the Internet." Read it and weep for the partnership of AAP and ALA. We're all thieves; the AAP is an honorable group of merchants who just want to slap anyone in jail who might use free speech to publicize weaknesses in encryption algorithms. (I guess free speech only goes so far in AAP's view.)

Of course she's sad that Adobe backed off on the Sklyarov case. She's proud that the AAP is seeing to it that free speech doesn't *mean* free speech. She tells

us that publishers are "responsible for content" and "trustees for the authors." I have heard much less enthusiasm for DMCA from those authors. And, of course, she believes that the stall in ebook adoption is because content isn't sufficiently protected.

I do agree with one Schroeder statement. "Making the most noise doesn't mean one is right." Right now, the AAP is making lots of noise.

Licensed or Sold?

Peter Suber's *Free Online Scholarship Newsletter* for November 9, 2001 notes an interesting Federal District Court decision. Softman Products buys Adobe software "collections," unbundles them, and sells the individual pieces at low prices. Adobe sued for trademark and copyright infringement. The court initially issued a restraining order—but then lifted the order and found that Softman is acting within its rights.

As Suber notes, the case is about software rather than "scholarship" (or writing in general) but may pertain to some of the brutal ideas that intellectual property should be licensed rather than sold. The court essentially said that Adobe's licensing language was irrelevant; in selling copies of its software, it was *selling*—with the first-sale rights that sales entail. Softman doesn't have the right to make and sell multiple copies of that software, but it does have the right to dispose of its purchased copies as it sees fit.

I love Judge Pregerson's analogy for Adobe's claim that it can control the resale of a purchased copy: "Adobe's position in this action would be more akin to a journalist who claimed that ownership of the copyright to an article allowed him or her to control the resale of a particular copy of a newspaper that contained that article." Tasini it's not.

Feedback: Your Insights

In addition to kind comments about *The Crawford Files*, feedback for *Cites & Insights* 1:11 included several brief annotations and comments worth noting:

- The first paragraph of "The Filtering Follies" cited a newspaper's Web site where the city was not named and quotes a person writing in that paper whose affiliation was unclear. George Porter at Caltech notes, "The *News & Observer* is based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Paul Jones is at the University of North Carolina, in Chapel Hill."
- Feedback engenders feedback! A letter from Harry Kriz appears in *Cites & Insights* 1:11 with some comments about what he learned using Bugnosis (specifically that the *Chronicle of Higher Education*'s Web site has concealed Web bugs that report your reading habits back to DoubleClick). Bill Drew at SUNY Morrisville, a long-time Web contributor, notes: "I was just trying Bugnosis… It actually increases the time it takes for a page to display. It almost doubles the time to display my Website at billdrew.net. It does show some interesting things but also makes me yawn and say, 'so what?'"
- George Porter separately noted that "PC Values" doesn't specify the OS used in each configuration. He suggests, "With the impending release of Windows XP muddying the waters, particularly with respect to ongoing operating costs of the bundled software, it might be worthwhile to comment upon the new model and distinguish between flavors of the OS in future installments." I'll add OS identification in "PC Values" from now on as part of the standard configuration with exceptions noted.
- Erik Jul of OCLC adds an interesting take on the micropayments issue (the first topic in "Trends and Quick Takes"): "Some countries, Iceland and Finland being premier examples, have essentially created a micropayment environment already. Purchasing a daily newspaper (for example) using a credit card, or buying a cup of coffee (or many cups, given the countries involved) and paying with plastic are the norm, not the exception. So it is less, it seems, whether micropayments will be accepted but rather when, where, and by whom. In some parts of the world, those questions have been answered." Jul identifies one solution to the micropayments problem, since the problem only exists for charges where credit card processing fees represent too much overhead. If that overhead can be reduced to the point where individual newspapers can sensibly be sold by credit card, the problem almost entirely goes away. I'm guessing that Finland and Iceland have almost universal implementation of smart credit cards (cards with microchips embedded), which should significantly lower processing costs. Such cards have been increasingly popular in Europe for years and are finally beginning to show up—slowly—in the United States. Of course, if better credit cards eliminate micropayments as a new business opportunity, the micropayment companies still lose out…

Moving on to 1:12:

- Dan Marmion, reading my summary of *PC Magazine*'s review of current database software,

noted my comment that Paradox is only available as part of Corel WordPerfect Office Professional. He notes, "I bought a standalone copy of Paradox just a few months ago—not for me, understand, but for one of my staff who's a Paradox junkie and hates Microsoft." When I asked if he could verify the version number, he responded, "All I know for sure is that it's Paradox version 9. The guy I bought it for thinks there might be a Paradox 2000 or 2001, but he's not sure." Going back to the summary, I see that I failed to mention version numbers for any of the databases under review. For the record, versions reviewed were FileMaker Pro 5.5, MS Access 2002, and Paradox 10. Checking Corel's own Web site and some ecommerce shops, it appears that Paradox 9 *is* available as a standalone product but that Paradox 10 is *not* separately available—at least not as of now.

Press Watch I: Articles Worth Reading

"The top 100 products of 2001," *Computer Shopper* 21:11 (November 2001), pp. 104-23.

This roundup surprised me. "Top x" articles tend to be silly and untimely—for example, naming the top products of 2001 in a July article that was written no later than May. I won't claim that these really are the "top" hundred products: it's a ludicrous premise, given the range of products and buyer needs. But these editors chose *very* broad categories, thus avoiding the usual problem that there can only be four Top Products in each of 25 categories. They also offered certain editors the chance to choose one category's "personal best"—and added that product to the appropriate list.

It's not a 20-page article, but at 13 text pages it's still long. That means one paragraph per "top" item, just enough to give you some sense of fit. Most items here appeared as Best Buys during the year. You'll find ten desktop computers, ten notebooks and eleven "mobile products" (mostly PDAs but with some MP3 players). Then there are 28 "hardware" picks ranging from $199 laser printers to $1,700 digital cameras. Two dozen software picks are strangely lacking in mainstream productivity software (there's not a spreadsheet, database, word processor, presentation builder, or—strangely—virus or utility package in the lot), but Windows XP makes the grade. (See John Dvorak's column in this issue—and then note that the editor who installed a late beta version hasn't had a crash in three weeks.) Finally, there are 13 games, six odd Web services (KaZaA? Really? Hidden adware and all?), and Dvorak's "bottom five," an easier-than-usual set of well-deserved cheap shots for such wonders as Webvan, Audrey (3Com's Internet client), and digital cameras that play MP3s.

I'm not sure it's worth seeking out the issue just for this writeup, but it's a more plausible "best of" than usual.

Bricklin, Dan, "Copy protection robs the future," www.bricklin.com/robfuture.htm, downloaded October 12, 2001.

Some old-timers may remember Dan Bricklin for his demo software, which for years was the best way to prototype the look of PC-based applications. *True* old-timers will remember that Dan Bricklin founded Software Arts, the creator of VisiCalc.

This brief piece could be considered "naïve" musing on archival issues—naïve in the sense that Bricklin's not an archivist—but it's a valuable discussion written in plainer English than most discussions from librarians and archivists. Digital archiving involves a range of problems—and those problems are made worse by copy-protected media. That's been true for some time (VisiCalc was copy-protected two decades ago and nearly all commercial videocassettes and DVDs are copy-protected), but it's getting worse thanks to DMCA, proposed laws that would be even more draconian, and idiot technological "innovations" to make CDs copy-proof.

Bricklin concludes, "Works that are copy protected are less likely to survive into the future." He suggests that artists and authors should be worried about releasing work only in copy protected form and that we may need new models that reward artists and authors while offering a path to the future.

Block, Marylaine, "Magazines: a tribute, or maybe an elegy," *Ex Libris* #119 (October 19, 2001) (marylaine.com/exlibris/xlib119.html) and Carlson, Peter, "Going but not forgotten: three shut their covers," *Washington Post* 10/23/2001, p. C01 (www.washingtonpost.com).

I couple these because they're both about problems in magazineland. The ever-valuable Marylaine Block, like me, is a "magazine junkie" for all the right reasons. She notes the falloff of general-interest magazines and wonders about the current die-off of magazines that don't have enough ads. A big part of the problem is that conglomerates have unrealistic

expectations for magazine and newspaper profitability. Block sees a general decline in magazines and worries about it. I'm an optimist by nature and I recognize that *way* too many new magazines were started in recent years (around 800 each year, declining to a "mere" 600 or so this year). I also recognize that some of my favorites have suffered, most notably *The Industry Standard*.

Still, as Carlson notes, half of all new magazines die in their first year; only one in ten lasts a decade. That's not new—and some long-established magazines simply run out of steam. Carlson offers brief comments on a trio of closed magazines: *Mademoiselle, Lingua Franca*, and *Brill's Content*. It's an interesting grouping.

Mademoiselle descended from heights of serious journalism and fiction to being a pseudo-*Cosmopolitan*. It had more than a million circulation but Condé Nast wasn't satisfied with ad revenue. After 66 years, the magazine shut down. I don't know: is there now an inadequate supply of magazines on fashion and sex advice for women? Or had *Mademoiselle* died as a interesting and distinctive outlet before it was terminated as a publication?

Brill's Content tried way too hard to be holier-than-thou and to move media criticism from the small-circulation ranks of *Columbia Journalism Review* and its competitors into the big leagues. I tried the magazine twice, and found it insufferable both times—and I *love* this stuff. It reached 300,000 circulation, which may be too high for any magazine in this niche. The magazine had a short life (less than four years).

Finally, *Lingua Franca* was around for a decade, covering academia in a wry, irreverent style. It never circulated much more than 15,000 copies—more than enough for many specialized publications, but apparently not enough to keep the publisher interested. I would say that it's sad to see *Lingua Franca* disappear—but I never got around to subscribing.

Spanbauer, Scott, "Windows XP inside & out," *PC World* 19:11 (November 2001), pp. 92-104.

Here's a long take on XP that offers good background and reasonably good advice, I suspect. There seems little doubt that XP is the most crash-resistant mainstream OS Microsoft has offered, and apparently the XP interface is sleek enough to charm some Mac users. The bad news comes in three parts: price, product activation (which *PC World* found less offensive than some other sources) and the two-year cutoff. The latter is one reason I haven't yet taken the plunge. Microsoft doesn't recommend the upgrade for computers more than roughly two years old; my current PC, still fast enough for anything I do, is more than 30 months old.

This is the kind of article that you should read in full if you're considering an upgrade. If you're buying a new Intel PC for home or small-business use, you'll probably get XP whether you want it or not—and you'll probably be happy with it.

Miller, Michael J., "The new Windows: great XPectations," *PC Magazine* 20:18 (October 30, 2001), pp. 110-28.

Where Spanbauer (above) offers a thorough once-over, Miller offers the kind of detail that *PC Magazine* used to be famous for. How fast is it? They tested 86 different system configurations to see how XP compares to the other current Windows versions; naturally, the answer is "it depends." There's too much here to summarize. "There's little question that this is Microsoft's best operating system to date, but that doesn't mean you have to buy it." For many of us, and to Microsoft's dismay, "So if it ain't broke…" may be the key (if partial) sentence here.

If you're not up on the lingo or lines of succession, Windows XP is *the* Windows OS for the future. XP Home replaces Windows 98 and ME; XP Professional replaces NT 4 and Windows 2000. Both use the same NT kernel; Professional offers additional features that will typically be needed in networked business situations.

Mills, Fred, "The Internet-only explosion," *Stereophile* 24:10 (October 2001), pp. 135-45.

If you think some midlist authors are unhappy with publishers, consider the plight of recording artists—particularly those who don't create mega-hits. They know the record companies are ripping off consumers by keeping CD prices artificially high; new performers go into hock so deeply to the record companies that some never see a dime in new royalties; and record companies make even the biggest publishers look adventurous by comparison.

Some authors are turning to PoD and other solutions that remove the publishing intermediary between author and reader—or at least reduce the intermediary function to a purely functional one. As this article demonstrates, it's not just book authors: a growing number of musicians are doing it.

Most of the article discusses and reviews "Internet-only" audio CDs and collections, including the massive ongoing series of Grateful Dead concert recordings (four CDs for $24, selections moved directly from the original tapes to CD), material from the archives of Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, the Doors, Pete Townshend, and Captain Beefheart—and lots of stuff from lesser-known contemporary

artists. In many cases, these are full retail-quality packages; if an artist or group has a little capital, it's possible to produce such a package and break even at 4,000 sales. For true unknowns, CD-Rs produced as they're sold keep costs down to almost nothing.

It's a long, interesting story showing more of the ways that the Internet and traditional media can work together. When MP3.com was going strong, it had a big program to promote unknown artists in a somewhat different manner. MP3-encoded tracks of a few songs were available for free legal downloading and, in some cases, bundled into one of four free "103 of the best songs you've never heard" MP3 CDs. If people like the tracks, they could order audio CDs direct from MP3.com at reasonable prices ($10, I believe): the company kept half and the artists got the other half. A win-win-win situation for artist, intermediary, and consumer—but other problems got in the way.

Miall, David S., and Teresa Dobson, "Reading hypertext and the experience of literature," *Journal of Digital Information* 2:1 (jodi.es.soton.ac.uk).

I was unaware so many English professors claim hypertext is somehow *better* for literature than linear text. Maybe it's just as well. When I read some of the assertions quoted in this scholarly article, I'm even more convinced that I'll never be a scholar. I never thought of books as "machines for transmitting authority" or that hypertext would somehow empower the reader or improve communication *in general*.

Miall and Dobson put together an interesting experiment. They took two short stories and split each one into chunks of text (one story for each of two experiments). Two groups of readers were asked to read and comment on the stories. For half of the readers, the chunks of text (presented on a computer screen) always ended with a "Next" link at the bottom of the page, offering a straight linear path through the story.

For the other half, each chunk of text (one or more paragraphs) included three hyperlinked words or phrases, designed to suggest a continuation focused on plot, character, or "foregrounding" (which I don't fully understand). Readers could choose links as they wished. In both cases, there was no "back" function.

Here's what makes the experiment interesting. All three links in each chunk of text had the same result: each linked to the next chunk of text. There was no way for readers to know that, of course, since there was no "back" function. Links were chosen so that the linkages made some sort of sense. In other words, all the readers were reading precisely the same text *in precisely the same order*—but half of the readers had reason to believe that they were choosing their own path.

How did it go? In the first sample, 75% of the hypertext readers "reported varying degrees of difficulty following the narrative. Only 10 percent of the linear readers made similar complaints." Hypertext readers took longer to move from screen to screen; they thought the story was jumpy and that they were missing information. The second story—a different kind of story—yielded similar results. Hypertext readers found the story confusing. Additionally, hypertext readers didn't comment on imagery as often as linear readers and tended to find the story less involving.

"Hypertext, as a vehicle for literary reading, seems to distance the text from the reader… The absorbed and personal mode of reading seems to be discouraged." The authors try to avoid generalization, but their conclusions seem sensible to me.

This is very much a scholarly article from literary scholars; expect some slightly tough reading and more arcane politics than you'll find in librarianship. But it's worth plowing through as one of the few real case studies of the effects of hypertext on reading.

Machrone, Bill, "The pendulum and the pits," *PC Magazine* 20:19 (November 13, 2001), p. 63.

Bill's peeved and for good reason. Ziff-Davis Media is dumping Lotus Notes in favor of Microsoft Outlook and Exchange. Not that Machrone loves Notes all that much (it's hard to love that clunky, demanding, idiosyncratic set of programs)—but Notes Mail is hack-resistant. Outlook? "The hackers' favorite playground" and the way far too many worms and viruses proliferate. "With the move to Outlook…we have donned the T-shirt with the big bull's-eye on the front and 'kick me' on the back."

Outlook XP is much better, and a good security group can alter its settings so that it's not entirely wide open. Still, I understand Machrone's frustration. I use three mail systems: Wylbur with Spires EMS overlay, an antique that doesn't handle MIME or attachments at all—and is, as a result, about as virus-proof as you can possibly get; Notes; and AT&T WorldNet's internal Web mail client. I've received dozens of occurrences of known viral messages through Notes; none has infected my work or home PC.

Metz, Cade, "What they know," *PC Magazine* 20:19 (November 13, 2001), pp. 104-18.

If you're concerned about your privacy on the Web, or lack thereof, this article is worth reading. It includes methods to increase your privacy and some interesting sidebars on "digital gumshoes" (what can someone find out about you from the Internet?) and just what information various companies do collect. The cover is a bit paranoia-inducing, with 2.5" high letters saying "THEY KNOW." in all caps; the article may not be reassuring, but it's a bit calmer than the cover.

Product Watch

Adobe Acrobat 5.0

Macworld for October 2001 gives a near-rave review to the Acrobat upgrade, limiting it to four mice mostly because it's not OS X native and doesn't integrate with Word as well as it might. Still, the new version offers quite a bit of new functionality for PDF users. The review is on page 36 and worth reading if you're a Mac user considering the upgrade.

Super-Fast Laser Printing

The new HP LaserJet 9000n costs $3,000 to $8,240, depending on duplexing, paper handling, collation, and so on. It's *fast.* HP claims 50 pages per minute for straight text—and when *PC Magazine* printed a 100-page file, average speed was 46.2 seconds, including eight seconds for the first page. That works out to more than 49 pages per minute within the job; files with lots of photos took a few seconds per page. Print quality is "as good as anything we've seen from a 600-dpi laser printer" (HP claims 1200dpi equivalence), with crisp text even at 4 points (the size of this text).

Visio Professional

Yes, Visio still exists, even after Microsoft took it over and incorporated the base program into Office XP. Visio Professional 2002 costs $499; Enterprise Network Tools 2002 extends its capabilities for another $500.

I was intrigued by the half-page four-dot review in the October 16, 2001 *PC Magazine*. If you want to diagram your computer network, Visio includes 23,000 images of equipment from 46 makes so that the diagram will be realistic. (You also get thousands of objects for electrical, HVAC, building and other plans). Here's the interesting capability for a big, complicated computer network: AutoDiscovery and Layout, which "automatically finds and catalogs every piece of equipment on your LAN." It builds an SQL database; as you change equipment on the LAN, only the new or removed equipment needs to be changed. There is one drawback: the program "may take from several hours to several days, depending on the size of your network."

Panorama 4.0

Access, FileMaker, Paradox: that's the database market, right? Maybe not. The November 2001 *Macworld* offers a favorable full-page review of ProVue's $300 Panorama, which offers cross-platform compatibility for Windows and the Mac and maintains high speed by running the database in RAM.

The review suggests that it's the "ultimate relational database for your desktop" if you don't need workgroup and Web-publishing features. Interface tools are said to be powerful and flexible; the system is fully relational.

Real 3-D Without Glasses!

It's true—more or less. Jan Ozer writes in the October 30, 2001 *PC Magazine* (p. 46) about two new displays that can yield a measure of apparent depth to displays. One, the Dimension Technologies 2015XLS Virtual Window, splits the pixels on a 15" LCD display to offer different information to your left and right eyes. Once you get the hang of it, and if software supports it, you can see true 3-D—but you're getting 512x768 resolution for $1,699! The Deep Video Imaging actualdepth display is even smaller and more expensive (13", $3,695); it mounts a transparent LCD display in front of the "normal" panel to offer two levels of depth. It may make sense for kiosks and some other specialized applications—but it's not ready for home use just yet.

Single-Pass Color Laser Printing

Most color lasers are *slow*—at least partly because the paper has to go through four passes, one for each color. Xerox now builds the $7,000 Phaser 7700DN, which can print all four colors in a single pass. The results? Color text at 20 pages per minute, full-page photos at 30 seconds for 200dpi, a minute for 300dpi. M. David Stone's review in the October 30, 2001 *PC Magazine* says that output quality is excellent and that both setup and network administration are straightforward. It's a heavy-duty unit with 650 page input capacity, duplexing, and the ability to print up to 12x18". He gives it a five-dot rating.

Digital Pens

I'm the wrong one to offer a fair commentary on this "burgeoning technology" (as a November 5

Wired News article puts it). Digital pens track the motion of the pen and translate that motion into electronic signals. Theoretically, those signals can then be translated to text through handwriting recognition. Maybe so. For those of us with nearly-illegible handwriting—which definitely includes me—I wonder whether this stuff *can* work.

Players include InMotion's e-pen to work with Microsoft's Tablet PC; it will sell for $150 and use "infrared and ultrasonic signals sent to a matchbox-sized receiver clipped to the page." Digital Ink has n-scribe, a pen with two sensors and a megabyte of RAM in its cap.

There's also Anoto's Chatpen, using a digital camera in the pen to track movement—but only if you write on special paper "impregnated with invisible-to-the-eye dots." The pen uses Bluetooth to send data to mobile devices.

How about QTM's Vpen? It uses lasers to measure motion based on the Doppler effect. It's an "all-around input device."

Press Watch II: Commentary

Blackford, John, "The reinvention of software," *Computer Shopper* 21:11 (November 2001), p. 52.

This column discusses Microsoft's .Net initiative and other ways to encourage you to rent your software. It winds up here because of the first paragraph:

> It's ironic that software is typically sold as a physical product, code stored on floppy disks or CD-ROMs inside a shrink-wrapped box. Within five years, that method will be as quaintly out of date as the horse and buggy.

Will we buy more software in downloadable form? Probably; in some cases, we already do. Will physically distributed software be irrelevant by November 2006? I'd be surprised—particularly given current sensitivities to viruses, worms, intrusive registration processes, failing ASPs and the like. For that matter, the biggest claimed "virtue" of subscription-based software may also be its greatest failings: upgrades are free, automatic—and unstoppable. Use the application and you get all the Greatest New Features, want them or not. I'm guessing we'll resist that for more than half a decade. I could be wrong.

Dvorak, John, "Dot-com season of the witch," *PC Magazine* 20:18 (October 30, 2001), p. 67.

Either Dvorak's a lot older than I think or he's developed a "right coast" attitude. Apparently them damn aging hippies are to blame for the excesses of the new economy—and here you thought it was a bunch of slick venture capitalists.

Really. I'm not kidding. "Many of the problems the industry is going through today are attributable to the lingering greed of the baby boomers, the crackpot notions of New Age nutballs, and the simple nuttiness and idealism of the one-time hippies." Oh, and "the decline began with the idealistic notion that the Internet was some sort of great liberating force."

You have to read this one-page rant several times to get the full flavor. "The initial quasi-socialistic view of the Net mandated that everything be free. This thinking soon devolved into West Coast libertarianism, which led the Net into a deterioration of porn, spam, and viruses." Huh? Later, "The [Internet IPO] mania was aptly led by ex-hippie baby boomers and their naïve 20-something minions, who honestly believed that just because they graduated from Stanford Graduate School of Business, they actually knew something."

Okay. Idealistic ex-hippies are now greedy baby boomers, aided by "naïve" Stanford MBAs (now *there's* an unlikely turn of phrase). Because we (I'm the right age, although I wasn't much of a hippie) have ideals, we're responsible for spam and viruses. Worse, we have Dvorak!

Everitt, David, "An end to squabbling over digital TV? Maybe." *MediaLife* 10/29/2001 (www.medialifemagazine.com).

It's probably unfair to David Everitt to include this report in "Press Watch II," but some comment is required. The article discusses the situation with broadcast digital TV and the new FCC task force set up to try to make headway. The problem isn't what's in the report—other than a suspiciously naïve comment from a university dean. The problem is what's missing, which is background on the government giveaway that started all this.

"All this" is the pair of deadlines for U.S. broadcast television stations to convert from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting. The first deadline arrives next year: every commercial TV station should be transmitting digital signals—over the second chunk of broadcast frequency that the FCC *gave* the stations based on this deadline. Roughly one-third of stations won't make the deadline. Oddly enough, nobody seems to be suggesting that the other stations should immediately lose their second frequencies—particularly not FCC chair

Michael Powell, a true free-market advocate (and son of Colin Powell).

The other deadline already has a hole in it big enough for the corporate greed of commercial TV. Come 2006, stations are supposed to *give back* their analog frequencies. But—in a twist not noted in this report—that deadline assumes that 80% of viewers will be able to receive digital broadcasts by then. That almost certainly won't happen, making the deadline moot. So the new task force will probably devise a new "realistic" deadline.

George Back, dean of communication at Hofstra, seems to think that HDTV is at the root of the problem. "They should find out why high-definition TV took precedence over digital TV. That preference really held back the transition… The market should have been allowed to decide this issue."

Yet another confusion comes from cable systems. These systems *must* carry all local over-the-air stations—and now broadcasters claim that cable should be required to carry *both* analog and digital signals, even when they present identical programming. The cable systems claim that's unreasonable and that "consumers have not been screaming for a redundant version of 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?'"

For the moment, leave the cable systems out of this. They don't enter into the quagmire at the heart of the problem. That quagmire comes from the FCC's original decision—which was to *give away* a huge chunk of the electromagnetic spectrum as a way to encourage consumer electronics production in the United States. Stations would broadcast glorious HDTV pictures; consumers couldn't live without the improved picture quality and we'd all go buy new TV sets, many of them made here. Come 2006, the broadcasters would return the old frequencies so that the FCC could auction them off (*for money*, not as freebies)—both to raise money and to serve other spectrum needs.

Back's suggestion, that normal-definition digital TV still offers higher-quality images (sometimes true, sometimes false) and that people really *want* more TV channels, sets aside this history. This alternative future essentially gives each broadcaster—I repeat, *gives*—room enough for five or six different channels where they currently have one. Is that a rational distribution of resources? Are commercial broadcasters somehow needy parties that can't survive without this government handout? Of course not; the buy-in for the second frequency allocation was *high definition* digital TV, not "you've done such a great job of acting in the public interest that we're giving you room for five more channels." Particularly since stations would just as soon use those channels for fee-based digital services that have nothing to do with free broadcast TV.

The assertion that high-definition TV has "taken precedence" is a little odd, given that very few people own HDTV sets *or* digital TVs. (Most high-resolution sets sold to date are "digital-ready," needing a new set-top box before they can actually decode over-the-air digital transmissions.) Most networks haven't bothered to broadcast much in HDTV (CBS being a notable exception)—and, as we found with S-VHS, most people won't pay for better picture quality.

What's going on here? Commercial broadcasters want to hang on to both channels: they (and their representatives) conned the government into a multibillion-dollar giveaway, and they have no interest in giving back. They want to use most of the digital allocation for extra moneymaking activities. They're looking at every possible way to achieve these ends. Public interest? What's that?

What does this have to do with libraries? Not much directly. Indirectly, the fees from the 2006 auction could be used for a number of social goods, some involving libraries. Don't hold your breath.

The Details

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